

Thomas D. Watkins, Jr.
Superintendent
of Public Instruction

June 8, 2001

State Board of Education

MEMORANDUM

Kathleen N. Straus
President

Sharon L. Gire
Vice President

Michael David Warren, Jr.
Secretary

Eileen Lappin Weiser
Treasurer

Marianne Yared McGuire
NASBE Delegate

John C. Austin

Herbert S. Moyer

Sharon A. Wise

John Engler, Governor
Ex Officio

TO: Michigan School Readiness Program State Aid Contacts

FROM: Lindy Buch, Supervisor, Curriculum, Birth – Grade 12
Reneé De Mars-Johnson, Coordinator, Early Childhood & Parenting Programs

SUBJECT: Maintaining Qualified Associate Teachers

Each spring many districts and public school academies are faced with tough decisions regarding the continuing status of staff in paraprofessional roles. Often cuts need to be made and staff with seniority assured that they will have a position when school resumes in the fall. With regard to the Michigan School Readiness Program, we urge you to consider the impact of replacing staff who have the training specified in the law. Changing staff who have not been trained to work with young children affects the quality of the program. Assisting in classrooms (or playgrounds or lunch rooms) of older children is not the same as being a partner in supporting the growth and development of our preschoolers.

The Michigan School Readiness Program seeks to offer children who have individual or familial factors that may impact their ability to succeed in kindergarten a high-quality preschool learning experience. Research has consistently shown that children with risk factors will have more positive outcomes when they have been provided high-quality staff interaction in classrooms with low teacher/pupil ratios. Therefore, the State School Aid Act is explicit with regard to the needed qualifications for the classroom staff and the Department has approved criteria that allows for a low teacher/pupil ratio in these categorically funded classrooms.

Section 37 (3) delineates the items that should be included in the application for funds that directly relate to the quality of the preschool program. Subsection (c) (ii) states that a district must assure that it only employs “paraprofessionals possessing proper training in early childhood development or who have completed at least one course in an appropriate training program, including, but not limited to, a child development associate credential (CDA) or associate degree in child development or other similar program, as approved by the department.” (P.A. 297 of 2000)

Categorical funding is provided with specific purposes in mind and thus has more guidance than other funds provided for in the State School Aid Act. As you consider the changes that may need to be made in your district/public school academy each year, we urge you to always consider the well being of children.